



Domestic Violence Safety Information

The information below is from the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault:

Q: What kinds of things do I need to take with me if I leave?

A: Below is a list of things that you will need to have with you:

- Identification documents such as your driver's license, your and your children's birth certificates, social security cards and public assistance paperwork.
- Financial documents such as bankbooks, checkbooks, copies of tax returns and proof of your spouse's income if applicable. You should also bring any available money and/or credit cards.
- Legal documents such as court orders, lease, deed, car registration and insurance papers, medical records, school records, work permits, green cards or visas and passports.
- Other practical items such as house and car keys, medication, small items that can be sold if necessary, jewelry, address book, phone card, photos and videos, some small children's toys, toiletries and diapers and changes of clothes.

Q: What can I do to be safer after I leave?

A: Below is a list of safety tips:

- If you stay in your home, change the locks and consider additional safety devices.
- Discuss a safety plan with the children for when you are not with them.
- Inform your children's school or caregiver about who has permission to pick up your children.
- Inform neighbors and your landlord that your abuser no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if they see him on the premises.
- Devise a safety plan for at work which includes who you will tell about your situation, and who will provide for your physical safety on the job. When you leave work, have someone escort you to your transportation and try to use a variety of routes to go home.
- Get an **Order of Protection from Domestic Abuse**.



Q: What is an Order of Protection?

A: Under South Carolina's "Protection from Domestic Abuse Act," the Family Court may issue an order which restrains your abuser from bothering you and provides other temporary relief such as child custody, child support, spousal support, use of the home, possession of personal property, costs and attorney's fees and any other appropriate relief. [Click here](#) to visit the South Carolina General Assembly's homepage to read the complete text of the "Protection from Domestic Abuse Act" in Title 20, Chapter 4 of the South Carolina Code of Laws.

Q: Who is eligible to get an Order of Protection?

A: Any household member (see definition above) who has been physically harmed or threatened with physical harm, including bodily injury, assault or sexual criminal offenses.

Q: Do I need a lawyer to get an Order of Protection?

A: No. Some domestic violence programs have advocates available to assist you in obtaining an order, but you don't need to have anyone represent you. Simply go to the Family Court Clerk's office and ask to fill out and file a "Petition for Protection from Domestic Abuse" form. You should go to the clerk's office in the county where your abuser lives, or where you live if your abuser is a nonresident or can't be found, or where you last lived together unless you are a nonresident, in which case you must file in your abuser's county of residence. There is no filing fee and the clerk's office will arrange for serving your abuser and scheduling a hearing.

At the hearing, both you and your abuser will be allowed to address the court. Try to have as much evidence as possible of your abuse, and your fitness as a parent if you have children. You can bring witnesses, affidavits, photographs of your injuries, financial information about you and your spouse if you are married to your abuser and medical and police reports. If you have children, be prepared to answer questions about how you can provide a stable environment for them. This can include asking to be allowed to move back home and have the abuser leave if appropriate. Based on the evidence presented, the judge will issue an order.

Q: How long is an Order of Protection valid?

A: The portion of the order often referred to as the "restraining order" is valid until the date ordered by the judge. Under a new law in South Carolina, the judge



cannot issue the order for less than six months nor more than one year. Other provisions in the order, such as custody, must be enforced until the court issues a further order regarding those issues either pursuant to the pending case or a separate action for divorce or separate support and maintenance. It is possible to receive permanent protection in other proceedings such as a divorce, but not through the Order of Protection from Domestic Abuse.

Q: How do I enforce the order?

A: Your local law enforcement must enforce the order if it is valid. It is a crime for your abuser to violate the order. Try to keep a copy of your order handy at all times and give an extra copy to someone you trust. While it is not required, you may provide a copy to your local law enforcement agency and they will enter your information on the National Crime Information Computer for access by qualified law enforcement officers only. That way, if you are ever without a copy of your order, the information will be automatically available for enforcement.

Q: If I got a protective order in another state can it be enforced here or do I need to have a South Carolina order?

A: Under both federal and state law, your order of protection must be given full credit in South Carolina as long as it appears valid on its face. It can be enforced without any kind of registration or certification in South Carolina; however, you may want to provide local law enforcement with a copy for their records. The terms of your order will be enforced even if the relief you were given would not be available under South Carolina law.

RECOGNIZING ABUSE – KNOW THE SIGNS

It may not be easy to identify abuse, especially at first. While some relationships are clearly abusive from the outset, abuse often starts subtly and gets worse over time. For example, abuse may begin with occasional hurtful comments, jealousy or controlling behavior. As it gets worse, the abuse may become more frequent, severe or violent. As the cycle of abuse worsens, your safety or the safety of your children may be in danger.

You may be a victim of abuse if you're in a relationship with someone who:

- Controls finances, so you have to ask for money
- Looks at you or acts in ways that scare you
- Acts jealous or possessive, or accuses you of being unfaithful



- Tries to control how you spend your time, who you see or talk to, where you go or what you wear
- Wants you to get permission to make everyday decisions
- Gets angry when drinking alcohol or using drugs
- Scares you by driving recklessly
- Threatens to kill himself or herself

You are very likely in an abusive relationship if you have a relationship with someone who does even one of the following:

- Hits, kicks, shoves, slaps or chokes you or threatens you with violence or a weapon
- Forces you to have sexual intercourse or engage in sexual acts against your will
- Calls you names, insults you or puts you down
- Prevents you from going to work or school
- Stops you from seeing family members and friends
- Hurts, or threatens to hurt you, your children or pets
- Destroys your property
- Controls your access to medicines
- Blames you for his or her violent behavior or tells you that you deserve it
- Says that his or her abusive behavior is no big deal or even denies doing it
- Tries to force you to drop charges
- Tries to prevent you from calling the police or seeking medical care

PREGNANCY, CHILDREN AND ABUSE

Pregnancy is a particularly perilous time for an abused woman. Not only is your health at risk, but also the health of your unborn child. Abuse can begin or may increase during pregnancy.

Abusive relationships can also be particularly damaging to children, even if they're just witnesses. For women in an abusive relationship, chances are much higher that their children will also be direct victims of abuse. Over half of men who abuse their female partners also abuse their children.

You may worry that seeking help may further endanger you or your children, or that it may break up your family, but in the long run, seeking help when you safely can is the best way to protect your children - and yourself.

AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP IS ABOUT POWER AND CONTROL



Though there are no typical victims of domestic violence, abusive relationships do share similar characteristics. In all cases, the abuser aims to exert power and control over his partner.

Although a lot of people think domestic violence is about anger, it really isn't. Batterers do tend to take their anger out on their intimate partner. But it's not really about anger. It's about trying to instill fear and wanting to have power and control in the relationship. In an abusive relationship, the abuser may use varying tactics to gain power and control, including:

- **Emotional abuse** - uses put-downs, insults, criticism or name-calling to make you feel bad about yourself.
- **Denial and blame** - denies that the abuse occurs and shifts responsibility for the abusive behavior onto you. This may leave you confused and unsure of yourself.
- **Intimidation** - uses certain looks, actions or gestures to instill fear. The abuser may break things, destroy property, abuse pets or display weapons.
- **Coercion and threats** - threatens to hurt other family members, pets, children or self.
- **Power** - makes all major decisions, defines the roles in your relationship, is in charge of the home and social life and treats you like a servant or possession.
- **Isolation** - limits your contact with family and friends, requires you to get permission to leave the house, doesn't allow you to work or attend school and controls your activities and social events. The abuser may ask where you've been, track your time and whereabouts or check the odometer on your car.
- **Children as pawns** - accuses you of bad parenting, threatens to take the children away, uses the children to relay messages or threatens to report you to children's protective services.
- **Economic abuse** - controls finances, refuses to share money, makes you account for money spent and doesn't want you to work outside the home. The abuser may also try to sabotage your work performance by forcing you to miss work or by calling you frequently at work.

BREAKING THE CYCLE IS DIFFICULT, BUT POSSIBLE WITH HELP

Domestic violence is part of a continuing cycle that's difficult to break. If you're in an abusive situation, you may recognize this pattern:

- Your abuser strikes using words or actions
- Your abuser may beg for forgiveness, offer gifts or promise to change



- Your abuser becomes tense, angry or depressed
- Your abuser repeats the abusive behavior

Typically, each time the abuse occurs, it worsens, and the cycle shortens. As it gets worse, you may have a hard time doing anything about the abuse or even acknowledging it. Over time, an abusive relationship can break you down and unravel your sense of reality and self-esteem. You may begin to doubt your ability to take care of yourself. You may start to feel like the abuse is your fault, or you may even feel you deserve it.

This can be paralyzing, and you may feel helpless or as though your only option is to stay in the abusive situation. It's important to recognize that you may not be in a position to resolve the situation on your own.

But you can do something - and the sooner you take action the better. You may need outside help, and that's okay. Without help, the abuse will likely continue. Leaving the abusive relationship may be the only way to break the cycle.

A number of government and private agencies provide resources and support to women who are abused and their children. These resources include 24-hour telephone hot lines, shelters, counseling and legal services. Many of these services are free and can provide immediate assistance.

KEEP YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PRIVATE

It isn't uncommon for an abuser to monitor mail, telephone and Internet communication. Take precautions to help maintain your privacy and safety by following these steps:

Telephone conversations

- Avoid making long-distance phone calls from home. Your abuser could trace the calls to find out where you're going.
- Be cautious when using a cell phone. Your abuser may be able to intercept conversations using a scanner. Switch to a corded phone if you're relaying sensitive information.
- Be aware of controlling use of your cell phone. Your abuser may use frequent cell phone conversations or text messages as a way to monitor and control your activities. An abuser may also check your cell phone to see who has called, or attempt to check your messages.

Computer use



If you think your abuser is monitoring your computer use, the safest bet is to access a computer at a friend's house or at the library. If you do use a shared home computer, there are several steps you can take to help maintain your privacy:

- **Use a Web-based program for e-mail** - programs such as *Outlook Express*, *Netscape Mail* and *Eudora* store sent and received e-mails on your computer. A Web-based e-mail service is safer. Most of these services - such *Gmail*, *Hotmail* and *Yahoo* mail - offer free e-mail accounts.
- **Store files on the Internet** - you can store files online and access them from any computer. A few companies that offer this service are *IBackup* and *HyperOffice*. You can also store documents as attachments in e-mail programs. Change your password often. Choose passwords that would be impossible to guess. The safest passwords contain at least six characters, both numbers and letters. Avoid easily guessed numbers and sequences.
- **Clear your Web-browser history** - browsers such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator keep a record of the Web pages and documents you have accessed. They also store graphics of images you look at. You can also use a program such as *Absolute Shield Internet Eraser* or *Speed Tracks Eraser* to clear your Internet records.
- **Clear your document history** - applications such as Word or Excel keep a record of edited documents. Don't store or edit any documents you don't want your abuser to see on a shared computer.

CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

Leaving an abuser can be dangerous. You're the only one who knows the safest time to leave. You may know you are in an abusive relationship and realize you need to leave as soon as you safely can. Or, you may be concerned about your partner's behavior and think you may need to get out at some point in the future. Either way, being prepared can help you leave quickly if you need to. Consider taking these precautions:

- You may want to speak with someone at your local domestic violence program to discuss the safety plan that is best for you. **In Greenville, call [Safe Harbor](#) at (864) 467-3636.**
- Practice how to get out of your home safely if you are involved in an explosive incident. Identify which doors, windows, elevator or stairwell would be best.
- Identify one or more neighbors you can tell about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear a disturbance.



- If possible, open a bank account and/or credit card in your own name, and think of other ways to increase your financial independence.
- Leave money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents, extra medicine and some clothes with someone you trust in case you must leave quickly.
- If you have school-age children, notify the school authorities or school counselor about custody arrangements and warn them about possible threats.
- Identify people who might be able to let you stay with them, or lend you some money. You should try not to stay with an unrelated adult of the opposite sex because this could later appear to be adultery if you go to Family Court.
- Keep the shelter or hotline phone number close at hand and keep some change or a calling card on you for emergency phone calls.
- If it is possible to do so safely, take your children with you, even if you are going to a shelter. This may affect your child custody case.
- Use your own instincts and judgment. Remember that nothing is more important than keeping yourself and your children safe.